



# City of Seattle

Department of Planning & Development

D. M. Sugimura, Director



## EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3011428

Address: 888 Western Avenue

Applicant: Jim Wescott, Weber Thompson Architects

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, August 24, 2010

Board Members Present: Brian Scott (Chair)  
Gabe Grant  
Sherri Olson  
Pragnesh Parikh

Board Members Absent: Jan Frankina

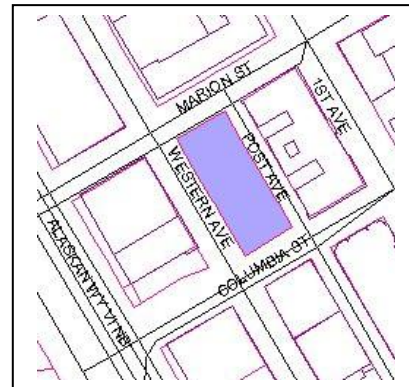
DPD Staff Present: Lisa Rutzick

### SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: DMC 160

Nearby Zones: (North) DMC 160  
(South) PSM 100 across Columbia Street to the south  
(East) DMC 160  
(West) DH1/45

Lot Area: 24,000 square feet



Current Development: Surface parking lot

Access: Currently from Marion Street to the north.

The relatively flat site bounded by Western Avenue, Post Avenue, Marion, and Columbia Streets lies in the southwest portion of Downtown just north of the Pioneer Square Preservation District. Currently used for surface parking, the full block site has two unusual right of way characteristics. The Marion Street pedestrian bridge to the Ferry Terminal abuts the site on the north, while the Columbia Street on-ramp rises above the center of the street adjacent to the south side of the site. The raised pedestrian path, the highway on-ramp, the surrounding four to six story buildings, and the trees lining the perimeter create a distinctive, tightly enclosed site. Post Avenue, which has a 36 foot right of way, carries traffic one-way south bound and is in need of repair.

Surrounding Development: Originally called the Commission District, the area where farm produce came into the City via trains, the district has a mixture of zoning classifications. The site is zoned Downtown Mixed Commercial with a 160' height limit. The area directly to the east is similarly zoned DMC-160, with the landmark Colman Building immediately across Post Avenue. To the east of First Avenue, the DMC zoning height steps up to DMC 340/290-400. To the south of Columbia Street the zoning category changes to Pioneer Square Mixed with a 100 foot height limit (PSM 100). The DMC 160 zone continues north paralleling the avenues. It extends west to Alaskan Way then transitions to Downtown Harborfront One with a 45 foot height limit (DH1/45). A 40-foot view corridor setback requirement exists on Marion.

The Colman Building across Post Avenue has city landmark status. Other significant buildings in the vicinity include the Federal Building to the north and Seattle Steam to the south of the site. The subject site lies just outside of the Pioneer Square Historic District.

ECAs: Liquefaction zone

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Land use application to allow a 16-story building containing 9,907 sq. ft. of commercial space with 208 residential units above. Parking for 124 vehicles to be provided within the structure. Project includes 4500 cu.yds. of grading.

### Other Information:

The Code requires "parking parity" in terms of the number of parking levels provided below grade and above grade. However, the Code allows DPD to grant an exception to this

provision. A request for that exception has been submitted to DPD (dated July 30, 2010) that requests that all of the proposed parking may be allowed above grade. This is not a departure, but instead is a Type I zoning decision made by DPD.

## **EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: August 24, 2010**

### **DESIGN PRESENTATION**

Three alternative design schemes were presented. All of the options include focusing the retail uses on Post Avenue and Western Avenue. All of the alternatives also included vehicular access off of Columbia Street, as well as the location of ‘back of house’ services.

The first scheme (Option A) showed a prescriptive zoning envelope in direct response to the development standards allowed in the zone. This results in a stair step massing form and the greatest square footage.

The second scheme (Option B) showed a “dog-bone” building configuration with the widest areas at the north and south ends of the block. A 12-foot notch in the central part of the building is located on the east and west facades. The notched area both reflects the form of the Colman Building to the east and opens the building up to the west.

The third and preferred scheme (Option C) showed a more modulated form with a 24-foot notched area on the east façade facing the Colman Building and a setback at the north side of the block. This scheme includes a three-story connecting “cube” between the building mass to the south and the pedestrian bridge to the north.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Approximately seven members of the public attended this Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Concerned that Post Avenue will become narrower due to the proposed sidewalk widening. Want to avoid creating a narrow canyon effect between the Colman Building and the proposed development. Also don’t want to lose the on-street parking.
- Concerned with the loss of the mature street trees that surround the site perimeter and would like to see these preserved.

### **PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS**

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members provided the

following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the Downtown Design Guidelines of highest priority for this project.

The Downtown guidelines are summarized below. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

#### **A. Site Planning & Massing: Responding to the Larger Context**

**A-1 Respond to the Physical Environment. Develop an architectural concept and compose the building’s massing in response to geographic conditions and patterns of urban form found beyond the immediate context of the building site.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed that the preferred option (Option 3) better fits into the neighborhood context and best holds the corners of the block and street edges. The Board acknowledged the unusual condition of the pedestrian bridge and the challenge of integrating it into the site and building design. The Board also recommended establishing a datum line on the façade design that responds to the nearby buildings and using this line to delineate the building base.

#### **B. Architectural Expression: Relating to the Neighborhood Context**

**B-1 Respond to the Neighborhood Context – Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features existing in the surrounding neighborhood.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that there really isn’t much precedent for the proposed three-story “cube” design that would connect the pedestrian bridge and the main building. The Board expressed support for the setback shown at the north side of the block to include some an plaza space and landscaping.

**B-3 Reinforce the Positive Urban Form & Architectural Attributes of the Immediate Area . Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighborhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed at length the importance of Post Avenue and that the treatment of this façade and its street level design is critical to helping create a more vibrant street.

The width of the existing sidewalk along Post Avenue is six feet, while the requirement is 12 feet. The design proposes a nine-foot width to allow for more generous landscape

treatment and street trees. The Board would like to see landscaping, street trees, minimum street width and strong retail bay frontage to encourage activation. The Board is supportive of the request to SDOT to modify the street width reduction and integrate adequate sidewalk width, landscaping and street trees and a loading area. The Board agreed that having a wider sidewalk is more critical than having a wider roadway.

- B-4 Design a Well-Proportioned & Unified Building. Compose the massing and organize the publicly accessible interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board encouraged a simplified architectural concept and form that is unified and not overly busy and instead responds to the more simple building massing of the historic building in the immediate context.

## **C. The Streetscape: Creating the Pedestrian Environment**

- C-1 Promote Pedestrian Interaction. Spaces for street level uses should be designed to engage pedestrians with the activities occurring within them. Sidewalk-related spaces should be open to the general public and appear safe and welcoming.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed Post Avenue and how to best enliven and take advantage of this unusually narrow and historic street to become a more animated and usable pedestrian and retail street. See also B-3. The Board noted a preference for generous landscaping than overhead weather protection along Post Avenue. They indicated potential support for a departure from overhead weather protection if it would be in direct conflict with the provision of street trees and generous landscaping accommodated for on Post Avenue.

See also the discussion of the ‘cube’ feature under C-2.

- C-2 Design Facades of Many Scales. Design architectural features, fenestration patterns, and materials compositions that refer to the scale of human activities contained within. Building facades should be composed of elements scaled to promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the importance of taking advantage of the south facing façade to bring light into the building. The Board also expressed support for the proposed notch on the east side of the building which alleviates the possible canyon created by two tall building on either side of the narrow Port Avenue.

The Board found the proposed curved west façade problematic due to its lack of architectural precedent in the area for such a gesture. Instead, the façade should be flat and strive for simplicity. The Board suggested that the *modern* portion of the building (above the datum line) should recede behind the *historic* building base (which references the historic context).

The Board requested that the proposed “cube” feature be as transparent as possible and eliminate the proposed cube design concept “B” with the angled facade. The cube design should be simple and avoid adding new angles and forms that are incongruent with the neighborhood context. Of paramount concern should be the connection between the pedestrian bridge, the subject building and the movement from the bridge to ground level – this circulation function should be clearly expressed in the cube design. The Board recognized the challenge of locating retail use at the second level. The Board encouraged the provision of seating and open space at the second level abutting the pedestrian bridge. The Board also agreed that the design of this connection should consider the light and shadow of the area below the bridge and endeavor to use translucent materials where possible.

The datum lines of the nearby historic buildings should be acknowledged. The Board cautioned against too much curtain wall and glass as being out of context. Punched windows should be considered in the design of the building base.

**C-3 Provide Active—Not Blank—Facades. Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that on Western Avenue the residential units at the parking levels could be shifted to the curtain wall area so that the parking levels could be behind the punched masonry grid block area . It seems like screening the parking behind the grid is more effective than screening behind the spandrel glass. See also E-2.

**D. Public Amenities: Enhancing the Streetscape & Open Space**

**D-2 Enhance the Building with Landscaping. Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping—which includes special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, and site furniture, as well as living plant material.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board focused on the Post Avenue streetscape and the Marion Street open space/plaza area. Both are prime opportunities for the integration of interesting landscaping and hardscaping to create visual interest at the pedestrian level but also as viewed from the pedestrian bridge. See also C-1.

- D-5 Provide Adequate Lighting. To promote a sense of security for people downtown during nighttime hours, provide appropriate levels of lighting on the building facade, on the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, and on signage.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board members noted they would like to see more information on the proposed lighting plan, particularly as it relates to the pedestrian bridge level and on the sidewalk/plaza area below the bridge.

- D-6 Design for Personal Safety & Security. Design the building and site to enhance the real and perceived feeling of personal safety and security in the immediate area.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board emphasized the importance of creating a safe and visually accessible area below the pedestrian bridge.

## **E. Vehicular Access & Parking: Minimizing the Adverse Impacts**

- E-1 Minimize Curb Cut Impacts. Minimize adverse impacts of curb cuts on the safety and comfort of pedestrians.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed that incorporating vehicular access from Columbia Street was appropriate. The Board would like to better understand how and where resident loading will occur and whether the proposed loading zone on Post Avenue is viable.

- E-2 Integrate Parking Facilities. Minimize the visual impact of parking by integrating parking facilities with surrounding development. Incorporate architectural treatments or suitable landscaping to provide for the safety and comfort of people using the facility as well as those walking by.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board was supportive of the proposal to include studio units at the corners of the parking levels thereby enlivening the facades at the corner locations with transparency and visual access to the lighting in those units beyond what the parking screening includes. The Board looks forward to learning more about how the cars are screened. The spandrel glass may be insufficient in terms of creating an overly blank wall.

## **DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES**

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) will be based upon the departure's potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better

overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s). The Board's recommendation will be reserved until the final Board meeting.

At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departures were requested:

- 1. Parking Location (SMC 23.49.019.B2.a2):** The Code requires that parking above the third story of a structure shall be separated from the street by another use for a minimum of thirty (30) percent of each street frontage of the structure.

The applicant proposes to provide active street façades in the form of studio apartments at the corner of Western/Columbia and Western/Marion only on levels two through five. The allocation would be 0% on Post Avenue, 20% along Columbia, 24% along Western and 24% along Marion. In this scenario, residential units would be on levels 2–5, not only the code required floors 4, 5 (above the third story). In lieu of the requirement for 15% per frontage, this treatment provides a net gain of activated area on the building, concentrated on the corners listed above, which front the major street on the site.

The Board was favorably inclined towards the departure request with the amendment that the units shown on the southwestern corner be shifted to join the units at the northwestern corner, which are shown in the curtain wall portion of the building. The parking would then be more effectively screened behind the masonry grid of the building base.

- 2. Upper Level Façade Modulation (23.49.058.B):** The Code requires that façade modulation above a height of eighty-five (85) feet above the sidewalk for any portion of a structure located within fifteen (15) feet of a street property line. No modulation is required for portions of a facade set back fifteen (15) feet or more from a street property line. The Code also states that any portion of a façade exceeding the maximum length of façade prescribed on Table 23.49.058A shall be set back a minimum of fifteen (15) feet from the street property line for a minimum distance of sixty (60) feet before any other portion may be within fifteen (15) feet of the street property line.

The applicant proposes to allow increased modulation on Post Avenue in lieu of the required modulation on Western Avenue in order to mitigate the impact on the historical Colman Building, and to enhance the Post Avenue pedestrian experience. The setback on Post Avenue would be a 24 foot by 68 foot setback notch.

The Board indicated initial support for the setback on Post Avenue because it creates more effective modulation in response to the form of the Colman Building.

## **BOARD DIRECTION**

**At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should move forwards to MUP Application in response to the guidance provided at this meeting.**



